

# Crucial Steps to Healing After a Heart-Numbing Divorce

Alexandria and Peter were high school sweethearts and married when they were 20 and 21, respectively. For 18 years, they lived an idyllic life—parents to two great kids, active in their church, steady employment throughout. Then one day, Peter announced he was moving out because he needed to get his head on straight and he couldn't do that home.

A year later, Peter called to ask Alexandria if they could meet for dinner at their favorite Mexican restaurant. She thought he was going to tell her he was ready to come home. Instead, he told her he was gay. Here's a glimpse at Alexandria's story and her healing journey, which she describes in more detail in her soon-to-be-released book, *Abandoned Into the Heart of God*.

**Q. How would you describe your marriage prior to his departure?**

A. I thought our marriage was good. We had the usual squabbles, like most couples. I was naïve, and he was a great actor. Many people saw him for what he was long before I did.

**Q. What was your relationship like over the year he was gone?**

A. He stayed in touch frequently, especially with the children. We worked out a plan that he would have the children every third weekend. He was very generous with money until the divorce.

**Q. Tell us about that fateful dinner date—your thoughts and feelings before, during and after dinner.**

A. The day of the dinner, I was so excited! I worked for the church we attended, and I can remember going to the sanctuary

that day and praying that I was going to hear him say that he'd made a mistake and wanted to come home. I rose from the altar, went back upstairs and told the senior pastor that Peter was coming home. I was sure of it. Looking back, I remember the look on my pastor's face when he said, "I hope so." His look said he doubted Peter was coming home. But I refused to think otherwise. We had a favorite Mexican restaurant where we had dined many times over the previous years.

While we were waiting for our food to be brought to the table, Peter told me he was gay. Suddenly, Mexican food lost its appeal. In my book, I talk about the sensations I experienced: feeling like I was going to be sick, feeling the room close in around me, and then feeling the arms of God pick me up and sit me on the back of the booth to listen to this couple (Peter and I) have this conversation.

Neither of us ate anything and we left the restaurant shortly after that. Peter came in for a brief moment to say goodnight to the children and he left. I had the kids go to bed and I sat in the old recliner for hours, going through every range of bad emotions possible. Numbness, anger, sadness, depression, fury ... every emotion you can think of, I went through during that night.

**Q. Were there ever any clues that your husband might be gay?**

A. He spent an exorbitant amount of time on the computer—into the early hours of the morning. I wondered if he was into porn, but I quickly put that thought out of my mind. After all, he was a deacon in our church, sang in the choir and we led a fellowship group together. Then, early in January, before he left that same month, he had a friend come over one Sunday afternoon. When he arrived, Peter was in the back of the house so I answered the door. In front of me stood a drop-dead gorgeous hunk of a man, and the thought dropped into my mind and spirit, "You've got a problem."

**Q. How and when did you tell your kids?**

A. Although the kids were young, I believe they suspected that Peter was gay long before I did. We never had a “sit-down” formal conversation about it. But at some point, I talked to each of them alone and confirmed what, by then, they had realized was true.

**Q. What was the following year like as you started going through your divorce and dealing with the reality of this man you thought you knew and trusted?**

A. There are five stages to the grieving process, as I write about in my book. The five stages are: denial/shock, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Over the first year and beyond, I moved through those stages, more than once and not always in the order listed, until I finally came to acceptance. It took between two and two-and-a half years before I was healed and part of that healing was acceptance.

**Q. What things did you do to maintain your sanity that first year?**

A. There were many things I did to save my sanity. Sometimes they worked, sometimes they didn't work. One of the main things I did was every afternoon, after the kids got home from school and I got home from work, I would talk with them for a few minutes, give them a snack and let them watch TV for one hour. During that hour, I would lie down and relax. Sometimes I even napped. When I got up, I was a little refreshed and felt like I could be the mom my kids needed me to be.

I realized I now had some extra time on my hands, and I'm an avid reader, so I started checking out books at the library. My sister stayed close by via phone and frequently came and picked me up to go shopping or out for coffee. I had one other friend who I confided in, and I saw a Christian counselor, who was a member of my church.

I also attended a weekend seminar called Fresh Start Divorce Recovery. This is an excellent organization, and I encourage men and women to attend one of their weekend seminars, if possible. But the most important thing I did was to bury myself in God's Word, to pray, to journal my thoughts and prayers, to cry out to Him and listen as He answered as only He could.

**Q. What are your thoughts on forgiveness, and where are you at with forgiving Peter?**

A. I knew I had to forgive him. But I didn't want to. The anger I felt towards Peter for destroying our family felt good and it was a shield against more hurt. I finally realized that the anger I felt was beginning to turn to bitterness and I didn't want that to happen. I began to pray that God would help me to forgive him, and eventually I was able to tell Peter that I forgave him.

**Q. Tell us about the abandonment issues you've had to deal with over your husband leaving you for a man.**

A. It destroyed me. Everything I thought he felt for me—love, affection, respect, desire—was now directed to a man. I realized that for 18 years, my marriage and my life had been a lie. It took me a long time to accept the fact that there was nothing I did—right or wrong—that caused Peter to make this choice. It took even longer to regain my self-esteem and self-worth. It was only when I realized my self-esteem and self-worth never came from my marriage, but from God alone, that was I able to move forward emotionally.

**Q. What does your life look like today?**

A. Today, I am married to a wonderful Christian man who supports me in everything I do. My children and I have wonderful relationships. Both my daughter and son are happily married, and I love their spouses, too. Peter and I are not in touch anymore. Once the children were grown and on their own,

there was no reason to stay in touch.

**Q. If you could sum up the top five things someone can do to heal from divorce/abandonment, what would they be?**

1. Realize you are not able to go through this time alone. You will need help and support.
2. Your first “line of defense” will be Jesus. If you don’t know him as your Lord, get into a church and learn about how much he loves you. Accept Him as your Lord.
3. Find a good Christian counselor, preferably one who has counseled other women.
4. Have one or two friends whom you can confide in and trust to keep confidences, and whom you can call in the middle of the night.
5. Take care of yourself. Get plenty of rest, eat right and spend time with God every day.

Alexandria Bagnell wrote her book, *Abandoned into the Heart of God*, to help women heal and discover God’s love for them. It will be released over the summer of 2017 from Westbow Press, a division of Thomas Nelson and Zondervan.

*Reprinted with permission from One Divorced DIVA to Another: A Blog From Women Seeking Healing From Divorce by **Ana Gascon-Ivey**. Ana is a long-time writer and editor based in Atlanta, Georgia.*